

MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL – SITE DESIGN
U.S. RESERVATION NO. 58
Massachusetts Avenue and 21st and Q Streets, NW

Report to the National Park Service

August 5, 1999

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) submits design plans for the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial (MGM), a gift from the Nation of India to the United States of America. The memorial site (U.S. Reservation 58) is located directly across from the Indian Embassy at 21st and Q Streets, NW.

Authority

Public Law 105-284 and the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 1007).

Commission Action

The Commission **approves**, pending completion of the Section 106 review required under the National Historic Preservation Act, the preliminary and final site and building plans for the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial, U.S. Reservation No. 58, Massachusetts Avenue and 21st and Q Streets, NW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 31.30(38.00)-40671.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

NPS submits preliminary and final site and building plans for the MGM. The memorial will be located on U.S. Reservation No. 58 at the intersections of Massachusetts Avenue and 21st and Q Streets, NW.

Existing Site

The site of the memorial is a triangular parcel of land along Massachusetts Avenue at 21st and Q Streets, NW (U.S. Park Reservation No. 58). This site is grass covered and surrounded by public sidewalks. The eastern portion of the site contains a specimen Weeping Beech tree that is approximately 100 years old. Additionally, there are two existing Linden trees parallel to the sidewalk along Massachusetts Avenue.

Proposed Design

The design of the MGM provides for a circular plaza with pedestrian access from the existing sidewalks on the north and south. The plaza is positioned on the western side of the site and will be finished with gray granite pavers.

A low seat wall projects from the western side of the circular plaza and a series of stone pedestals containing inscriptions projects from the eastern side of this plaza. The seat wall and inscription pedestals will be a reddish colored granite.

The principal element of the MGM is an 8-foot, 8-inch high bronze sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi. It will be mounted on a 3-foot, 4-inch-high reddish granite base, resulting in a total height of approximately 12 feet for both the base and the sculpture. The reddish granite base will be finished in a partially rough-carved and smooth-carved manner. The top is rough and natural in texture and the sides will be polished.

Landscaping consists of planting new grass and incorporating low ground cover around the low seat wall and pedestal inscription area.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its June 3, 1999 meeting, the Commission approved the site for the MGM and the sculptural element. The sculptural element was limited to a height of eight feet (excluding the base). The Commission also recommended that NPS establish design guidelines for the memorial that would help to preserve and protect the Weeping Beech tree located on the eastern half of the memorial site.

RESPONSE TO COMMISSION ACTION

The proposed final site and building plans are responsive to previous actions of the Commission. The site design provides for memorial development to take place west of the Weeping Beech tree. It is designed in a manner that visually incorporates the specimen tree, as well as the existing Linden trees on site, into the overall composition of the memorial environment. Although the sculptural element is eight inches above the height previously approved by the Commission, staff believes that this increase is negligible.

EVALUATION

Approval of the preliminary and final site and building plans is recommended. The MGM will positively enhance the overall ambiance of U.S. Reservation 58 as well as provide a thematically related visual element in the foreground of the Indian Embassy. As mentioned, the minor increase in height of the sculptural element is negligible.

The memorial, on axis with the Weeping Beech tree, visually incorporates the tree into the overall memorial design. The tree is further buffered from the memorial plaza by a bed of Lambs Ear ground cover. Pedestrian access to and from memorial elements should not adversely impact the Weeping Beech tree. The entire eastern portion of the site is open lawn "protected area" which serves as a visual backdrop and setting for the principle memorial elements. The NPS and the memorial sponsors are commended for protecting and incorporating the Weeping Beech Tree into the overall memorial design.

The main entrance to the Indian Embassy is located across the street and to the west of the memorial plaza. Visitors to the embassy generally cross Q Street from the sidewalk near the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Q Street. The memorial space is far enough from the entrance to the embassy so as to not dramatically change pedestrian circulation patterns.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on July 14, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The project was reviewed and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts at its July 15, 1999 meeting.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The preferred site for the memorial is located within the L'Enfant City and adjacent to Massachusetts Avenue, NW, which is a designated Special Street in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposal is consistent with the following applicable policy:

Special Streets and Places should be maintained and enhanced in a manner that promotes their roles as major features that help establish the images and symbols of the National Capital in the minds of its residents and visitors. They should be embellished, when possible, with monuments, fountains, sculpture, gardens, distinctive buildings, and other features of civic art.....

The memorial will also be consistent with the Federal Facilities Element, which states:

New memorials to be located in the L'Enfant City and environs should be carefully sited to refine and complete the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans so far as possible.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, NPS has submitted a Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed MGM. The site is consistent with other land uses within the urban design framework of the current street layout of Washington, DC. U.S. Reservation No. 58 serves as open space in the context of a neighborhood setting.

The design effectively provides access to and from the memorial's primary elements via existing surrounding pedestrian circulation patterns. Pedestrian traffic is not encouraged to occur in the vicinity of the trees that are to be protected.

No parking spaces would be constructed for the MGM because metered public parking spaces are available in the immediate vicinity of the memorial.

Stormwater from the park parcel is currently dissipated across the turf of the park. Sidewalks outside the memorial adjoin the park on three sides and this runoff is directed to the local storm sewer system. The memorial site is not within the 100 year flood plain.

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The site is on a federal reservation which is part of the L'Enfant Plan and is within the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District. NPS is in the process of consulting with the SHPO and indications are that there will be no adverse effect. NPS is awaiting formal response from the SHPO regarding the finding of no adverse effect on historic resources in the immediate area.



